Schoolscapes

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As we look foward to the new year, I wish to express my deep gratitude for the excellent work you have done. I would also like to offer you my best wishes for the year ahead.

Your devotion, competence, passion and enthusiasm have enabled us to make great strides forward, and for this you have my sincere thanks. Together we—the partners in the education system as well as the teachers and school staff—have been working hard to implement the reform and ensure its success.

To you and yours I offer my best wishes for peace, health and happiness.

Minister of Education
François Legault

Draft Policy on the Evaluation of Learning

Issues and Challenges

Since the beginning of the school year, there has been much talk about report cards, marks, end-of-cycle evaluation, progress reports, and so on. At the November 6-7 province-wide meeting, Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes, outlined the main points of the *Draft Policy on the Evaluation of Learning*, as well as the main challenges that lie ahead in this area.

"I think we should first remember that the report card is part of a process of evaluation of learning, and situate it within the context of the draft policy which is now being submitted for consultation," said Rioux-Dolan.

This draft policy is the result of a process carried out over 1999-2000, which involved representatives throughout the education community, in both the English and French sectors, public and private: heads of educational services at school boards, coordinators, school principals, teachers, education consultants, parents, university professors and representatives from the departments concerned within the Ministère de l'Éducation.

The draft policy is designed for the youth, adult and vocational education sectors. "We respected the major orientations of the different education sectors so as to have a policy that is coherent with the major orientations of the reform in both the youth and adult sectors, but also with those of the reform that took place a few years ago in vocational education," Rioux-Dolan explained.

The draft policy describes the historical background to the current reform and then outlines the scope of the policy, its objectives, the process and purposes of evaluation, the values, the orientations, principles and guidelines for evaluation, and the roles and responsibilities of the partners involved.

The evaluation of student learning in Québec has gone through three main periods in its evolution: evaluation of knowledge acquisition, evaluation of the degree of mastery of specified objectives, and evaluation of competencies. "Since the publication of the General Policy for Educational Evaluation in 1981, significant improvements have been observed in the evaluation practices used by teachers. However, there is still room for additional improvements," said Rioux-Dolan.

This policy concerns the student, the school, cycle and program teams, parents (as the partners of schools and vocational education centres), certain staff members of school boards and private schools, the members of governing boards, and businesses involved in general education in the adult sector and in vocational education. It also informs community organizations, certain staff members at the college level, and university professors responsible for training future teachers.

The draft policy's first objective is to specify the values, orientations, principles and guidelines governing the evaluation and recognition of competencies, the recognition of competen-

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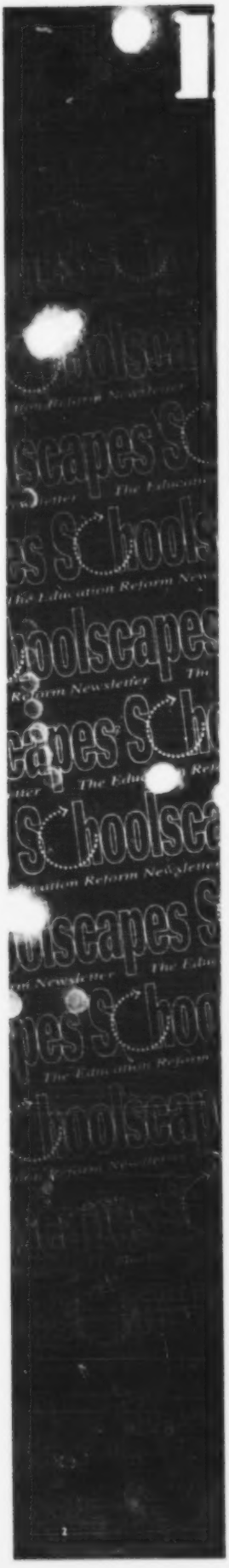

cies, and the recognition of prior scholastic and experiential learning.

"A second objective is to reaffirm the importance of evaluation and the necessity of ensuring its consistency with programs of study," she said. "In the educational policy *Québec Schools on Course*, the evaluation of student learning is considered a central component of the curriculum. The present draft policy gives it a central role with other elements which, although not new, give it more emphasis in order to help students achieve success."

The draft policy also aims to promote ongoing evaluation as part of the day-to-day learning process in order to encourage the development of competencies in students, and to assign roles and responsibilities in matters of evaluation.

"Evaluation of learning is a process that involves making a judgment about the development and acquisition of competencies in order to make decisions," Rioux-Dolan explained. The evaluation process is divided into five stages: planning, information-gathering, interpretation, judgment, and communication. "These stages are essential for ensuring a fair and equitable evaluation."

Evaluation should be planned at the same time as teaching and learning activities. Information may be gathered on the way in which a task is performed, as well as on the results obtained once the task has been performed.

Interpretation "may involve comparing results with the expectations stated in the program (known as criterion-referenced interpretation). It may also involve comparing the student's results at different stages in his or her learning (known as self-referenced interpretation). Finally, it may include norm-referenced interpretation, which means comparing the student's results with those of the group—not to rank the students, but for placement or selection purposes. This is used particularly at the secondary level," Rioux-Dolan explained.

Margaret Rioux-Dolan

The next stage, the whole question of judgment, will require particular emphasis in the implementation of the reform, she said. "The teacher's professional judgment in relation to the evaluation process is a vital aspect in order to give parents and students an accurate picture."

The last stage is one of communication providing information to parents and students. "This must be done using clear and simple language that is meaningful to the parents reading it," she stressed. The report card must present concise information adapted to a general public. "The idea is not only to give parents an overall picture of their child's progress, but also to get their collaboration in supporting their child." The information given should also help engage students in their learning process.

The orientations of the education reform assign four specific purposes to the evaluation of student learning. The first, fundamental to the reform, is the support of learning. "It is important to provide feedback to guide students in modifying their learning strategies," Rioux-Dolan explained. A second purpose is the recognition of competencies, indicated in a progress report at the end of a cycle in general education in the youth sector, at the end of a course in general education in the adult sector, and at the end of a module in vocational education. Recognition of prior scholastic and experiential learning, carried out as needed, takes place in general education in the adult sector and vocational education. Finally, certification of studies takes place upon completion of studies.

"In a policy on student learning, in order to be able to treat students equally and fairly, we need certain underlying values," she said. Evaluation must be based on the values of justice, quality and equity, together with the values of coherence, transparency and rigour.

"The orientations enable us to see where we want to go with the evaluation of student learning," Rioux-Dolan stated. To begin with, the evaluation of student learning must serve to promote educational success. "This links the support of learning purpose and teachers' observations or information-gathering so as to help students improve their learning strategies, and to help teachers adjust their teaching practices in order to foster success."

The evaluation of learning must also be based on the teacher's professional judgment. "It is an important pedagogical action. We can't just add up the data. We need to process this information to give students an overall report of their progress in class."

A third orientation is that the evaluation of learning must promote the use of quality writing in the language of instruction. "The quality of writing must be a focus for all teachers, in all subjects and at all times, including evaluation," she stated.

Finally, the fourth orientation states that the evaluation of learning must uphold the value that society accord to official certification documents. Official documents must in all cases be issued in accordance with the requirements set out in the Basic School Regulations, and must be issued following an evaluation of learning based on uniform standards.

Rioux-Dolan emphasized four major challenges in the evaluation of students' learning: coherence, exercising judgment, communication with parents and students, and training.

"From the beginning, we have tried to establish a close link between teaching, learning and evaluation. This is not meant to be a pious wish, but should be integrated into our teaching practices on a daily basis." However, it is upon implementing the evaluation practices in classrooms in the coming months that we will be able to observe, verify and validate them, she said.

In terms of the exercising of judgment in evaluation, from now on, Rioux-Dolan said, teachers will have to use a more global and integrated approach. "This is essential in order to be able to attain our objective of justice and equality for all students. However, it will require intensive support."

Communication with parents and students will be fundamental. Finally, initial training and continuing professional development are essential to provide guidance to the school teams, and to help the teams to develop the professional competencies needed in order to implement the reform—with success for all!

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

The following principles and guidelines apply to general education in the youth sector.

Principle of evaluation as an integral part of learning

- Evaluation activities must be planned at the same time as teaching activities.
- Evaluation carried out during the development of competencies must focus on the result obtained as well as on the learning strategies used by the student.
- During the learning process, the teacher's judgments concerning the development of competencies must be based on a self-referenced or criterion-referenced interpretation.
- Evaluation of the acquisition of the competencies must be based on a criterion-referenced interpretation.
- The frequency of communication with parents is prescribed by the Basic School Regulation. However, the communication must be planned to occur at appropriate and significant times in the development of the student's competencies during a learning cycle.

Principle of student participation in evaluating the development of competencies

- During the learning process, evaluation must encourage students to become involved and to take responsibility for their learning.
- Evaluation of a student's learning must allow the student to reflect on his or her learning strategies.

Principle of respect for difference and diversity

- During the learning process, evaluation situations must take into account the fact that not all students learn at the same pace and in the same way.
- Learning must be evaluated in such a way that certain students are not disadvantaged by cultural references.

Principle of conformity with the programs

- A judgment made concerning the acquisition of competencies must be based on information gathered at different times and in different contexts.
- Evaluation of the acquisition of competencies must focus on the performance of an individual student, even if the evaluation involves teamwork.
- Evaluation of the acquisition of a competency (toward the end of a cycle, course or module) must call upon the methods and strategies used in complex, contextualized tasks. However, during the course of learning, simple tasks may also be used.
- Evaluation of the development or acquisition of competencies must provide an opportunity to verify whether the student can apply the knowledge and competencies to perform a task within or outside the school setting.
- In distance or home education, the evaluation focuses and criteria must be the same as those used in schools, and the evaluation conditions must be comparable.
- At the end of a cycle, evaluation must focus on the degree to which the competencies have been acquired.

Principle of collaboration

- In distance or home education, evaluation related to the acquisition of a competency must take place at the school or centre concerned.
- A judgment made by a teacher concerning the acquisition of competencies must take into account the judgments made by the members of the cycle team and, if applicable, the information provided by other stakeholders.
- When a student is promoted from one cycle to the next, the cycle team must give information that the team for the following cycle can use to provide assistance or enrichment measures for the student as required.

Principle of respect for the rules of ethics

- A sufficient amount of pertinent information must be obtained during the information-gathering stage.
- The student must be aware of the procedure and criteria used in the evaluation of learning.
- The student or the student's parents, where applicable, are entitled to be made aware of the information used to make a judgment concerning the student's learning.
- Teachers and the other stakeholders involved in evaluation must keep up-to-date in the area of evaluation of learning.

Principle of certification of studies that guarantees the social value of official certification documents

The State certifies secondary school studies in general education in the youth and adult sectors and in vocational education by issuing an official document to every person who has met the conditions prescribed by the Basic School Regulations.

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Achievements and Challenges

At the closing of the first province-wide meeting of 2000-2001, Robert Bisaillon, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, paid tribute to the education community for the work accomplished so far in implementing the education reform. He also took the opportunity to underline the challenges that remain in order to ensure the implementation of the new curriculum.

Visibly pleased with the education community's success in meeting the challenges of the last year, Bisaillon took a few minutes to go over each in turn. He began by expressing his enthusiasm at the widespread mobilization currently taking place. "We have not seen such excitement and activity on the pedagogical level in a long time. This will inevitably translate into action on the institutional level—if it has not yet done so," he said. In the field, assimilation of and adherence to the concepts, principles and values set forth in the reform appear to be progressing well; the movement is truly underway.

Bisaillon attributes this achievement to two strategies. The first is training which, while targeting the individual needs of each community, has taken the form of a web with the creation of networks, group training, support, peer groups, mutual assistance, etc. "In fact, this training is a perfect example of what we have been aiming for in modifying our practices, since it has had the effect of bringing people together," said Bisaillon.

Secondly, this mobilization has been made possible by putting the people involved at the heart of the reform, allowing them to progress at their own rate and making them responsible for its success. "We are not going over their heads. They are the ones who will have to meet the challenges, and so we must respect them," said Bisaillon. The assistant deputy minister called on the community to pay special attention to those implementing the reform, and to be attuned to signs of fatigue and exhaustion so as to avoid "stretching the elastic band too far—everything depends on the rate at which we ask people to change."

Another challenge met is that of teamwork and the use of resources present in each community. "The driving factor behind this achievement is leadership," said Bisaillon. "It is about recognizing the need to bring people together. Those who succeeded probably either had a certain moral authority or transmitted a message that inspired belief."

He is proud that schools and school boards have taken the implementation of the reform into their own hands by developing specific strategies according to their own needs and objectives. These initiatives have led to innovative projects that have often had the effect of rallying support. He noted, for example, strategies related to the use of time—specifically freeing up time—which is currently a major concern. There have also been strategies to raise awareness among parents. "One approach is to have parents go through the same experience of assimilation that teachers have had to go through. Even though this may be difficult for them, it is often the best way to communicate a message," said the assistant deputy minister.

Relations with parents

Communicating with parents is the school's responsibility, and without a strategy schools can run into problems, Bisaillon warned. He cautioned administrators to be aware of "the real dangers in our relations with parents and the impact that parents and public opinion can have." A distinction needs to be made, he said, between parents, who are generally favourable toward the reform and who really and truly exist, and public opinion, which is generally unfavourable and is manufactured. "We must make sure that parents don't disappear into the crowd of public opinion and that they retain their own judgment according to what their child is experiencing and being offered."

Teachers should play a central role in relations with parents, because they are the ones who can tell parents exactly what is going on, and they are the ones parents trust. School principals are responsible for keeping the governing boards informed. "Develop strategies," Bisaillon urged. He suggested providing information through local and regional newspapers—the most widely read in Québec. The handing out of report cards can also be used as the first step, "without worrying parents," he specified. "Both the Minister and I, during school visits, have heard teachers tell parents, 'We don't know what's going on. At some point they'll tell use if we should still be giving marks. We're just as worried as you.' This is perhaps not the best strategy for establishing confidence!"

Evaluation is undoubtedly the number-one preoccupation at this time. Bisaillon therefore wished to clarify this issue. Like the reform as a whole, he said, changes in evaluation should take place at an individual rate. Some schools have been working with criterion-referenced evaluation, and consequently, descriptive report cards, for the past 15 years. "The debate in these schools was settled long ago—let's not 'contaminate' them with concerns they no longer have." At the other end of the spectrum, many schools still use norm-referenced report cards. "Let's not force these people to make an about-face. That would counter the progress made elsewhere." Change should happen gradually, he stressed. There is no need to rush ahead; it is more important to start out on the right foot. "There is a progression to be followed. Otherwise we're not talking about a reform, but simply about report cards."

For teachers, there is another important challenge: moving from theory to practice, or, as Bisaillon put it, "the development of a culture of reflective practice." He has met a good number of teachers who have begun to modify their teaching practices and to question their old teaching methods. "Others have already gone far ahead with changes and say they could never go back to their old ways." This kind of testimony only two months after the implementation of the reform is significant, to say the least. "All teachers will have to start to reflect on their practices," he said. "This is possible through the sharing of expertise, but we can also expect an increase in the demand for training and follow-up."

Teachers are also called upon to reclaim control of the activity of teaching, "in other words, to take responsibility and draw on their own professional expertise as opposed to succumbing to the temptation of using ready-made models," explained the assistant deputy minister. Many teachers are calling for "turnkey" solutions—such as a province-wide report card. "It is a tremendous challenge to propose models that won't detract from teachers' professional autonomy," Bisaillon said. In order to achieve this professionalization of teaching, teachers must first assimilate the new concepts—such as that of competencies, which many still do not fully understand—and the Québec Education Program. It is essential that teaching professionals take the time to read this "brick" (as the QEP is popularly called). "There are reading strategies that can be used, but sooner or later, every teacher must read the Québec Education Program."

From a management point of view, Bisaillon pointed to a lack of cooperation between specialists and teachers, who, even today, often work separately. "Can a cycle team exclude the specialists?" he asked. "There is a much wider gap separating these two groups than I had thought. There are most likely organizational reasons explaining why these two groups do not always agree." A second challenge for managers consists in meeting the diversity of needs. "It was so much easier when it was decreed that everyone had the same needs. Now, you're being asked to meet a variety of needs, in schools which are themselves very different from one another." So far, the schools that have taken these differences into consideration have obtained positive results, he said.

The start of secondary school

During one series of workshops at the province-wide meeting, representatives of secondary schools presented projects involving the first steps towards the reform. "It is surprising to see how many different starting points there are," said Bisaillon. However, he noted, all the projects had one point in common: they all began with the staff studying the needs of students in difficulty. When one third of students drop out between Secondary I and Secondary III, there is ample reason for reflection. School personnel therefore began to question their practices. While the classic reflex is to blame the students, these schools decided to look for other factors so as to find solutions.

During this reflection, many teachers discovered the virtues of interdisciplinary teamwork. "When you start working in teams, you discover that it is not just a demand: it breaks your isolation, builds solidarity, and allows good ideas and new dynamics to emerge."

Bisaillon hopes the process of change set in motion at the elementary level will arouse curiosity. "I had heard secondary school teachers ask, somewhat disdainfully, whether students were still learning or just playing in elementary school," he recalled. These teachers were invited to visit the schools and see for themselves. Their reaction? Shock at first, said Bisaillon, and then recognition of the need to change teaching practices in secondary school in order to accommodate this "new generation."

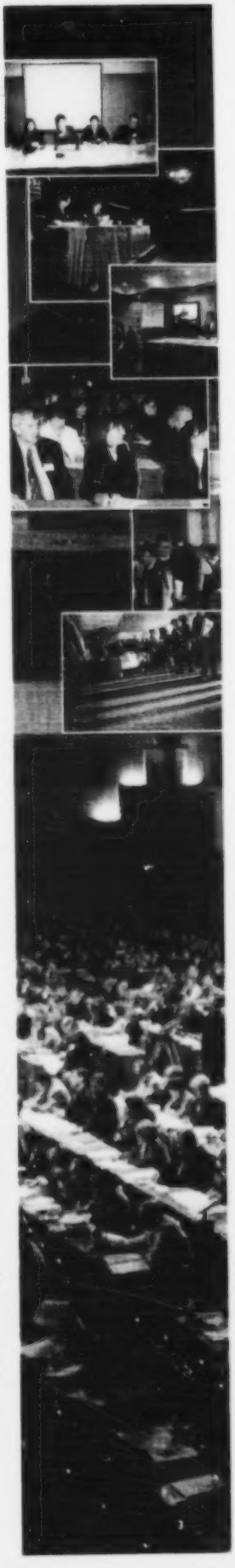
The catalyst for change will most likely differ from one school to another; what's important is to find the right one for each school. The secondary school projects presented at this province-wide meeting were testimony to this diversity, with more than a dozen projects from various regions, each one different because it reflected the specific needs of its community. According to Bisaillon, the best "door" to the reform is, without a doubt, motivated and determined people. "It is best to concentrate on a core group of teachers, without trying to win over the whole school at once, and to encourage discussion," he advised. Once again, the key to success is to respect each person's own rate of change.

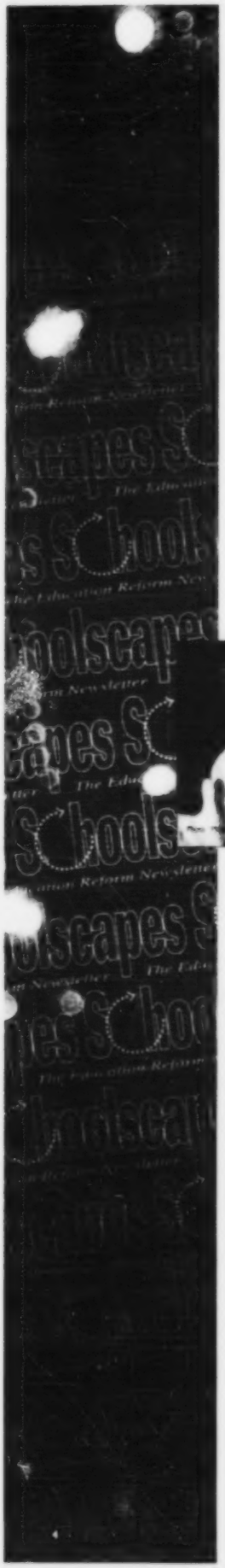
As for the evaluation of student learning in secondary school, the context is evidently different from that of elementary school. The large number of students to be evaluated and the fact that other levels of education offer the same certification of studies are two main differences. "But, let's take things one at a time," said Bisaillon.

Going in the right direction

"Useful and necessary growth cannot take place without change," Bisaillon concluded. "Generally, everyone is for growth, but very few people are for change. We need to start thinking about this together. If students do not have the opportunity to grow and develop through their learning, they will not change their ways of doing things. The same can be said of teachers."

The first step along a new path is the most important. "It is perhaps even more important than the path itself, because if that first step had never been taken, we can be pretty sure that everything that followed would not have existed," said Bisaillon. "It seems to me that we have taken that first step, and that, if we don't trip over our feet in the coming weeks on the issue of the evaluation of learning and report cards, we'll have built ourselves a beautiful, wide road to the future."





Draft Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning

Initial Reactions, Comments and Concerns

Initial feedback on the *Draft Policy* is positive. It is considered consistent with the spirit of the *Québec Education Program*, integrating evaluation into the learning process. Some issues still require clarification, however; these will no doubt be discussed during the consultation process, to be carried out from November 27, 2000 to March 1, 2001 with school boards, public and private educational institutions, and the MEQ's partners.

Andrew Aitken
Principal of Ste-Foy Elementary School (Central Québec School Board)

Andrew Aitken, principal of Ste-Foy Elementary School (Central Québec School Board), sees the draft policy and the accompanying guide for the evaluation of student learning (still a working document) as two very useful support documents.

In its second year as a pilot school, Ste-Foy Elementary is works with cycle teams and has been experimenting with new evaluation methods.

"The draft policy and guide will help us get a handle on what we're trying to do," said Aitken. "These documents will be very helpful when we look at who does what, the different elements of the assessment process, and the tools we need to develop."

For example, he hadn't realized the strong focus placed on cycle teams. "The cycle team is responsible for a variety of things. I think that's a very good thing. It's not entirely new to us, because we've been working with cycle teams for a few years."

His only concern is that the draft policy still mentions norm-referenced interpretation (i.e. comparing a student's results with those obtained by the rest of the group). "I don't see us using that. It doesn't seem appropriate for what we're trying to do."

Ainsley Rose, Director of Educational Services for the Western Québec School Board and co-chair of the implementation design committee, considers that the draft policy captures the essence of the Québec Education Program.

"The draft policy indicates the latitude given to schools and teachers, allowing teachers to be responsible for making judgements about the students' learning. That's very positive. It is also the first time such a policy applies not only to the youth sector but to the adult and professional sectors as well. This will help ensure consistency."

Yet it is still too early to tell how the draft policy will translate in the field, he says. Much will depend on the practical elements still to be developed, such as the evaluation instruments. "This is the biggest concern of teachers, who will have to develop these instruments."

As well, many points still need to be clarified. "For example, the draft policy does not refer to what to do with kids who do not obtain the required competencies at the end of a level."

A major concern in the secondary schools, Rose said, is whether changes will be made to the secondary school leaving exams to reflect the program's new approach and content. "It is not clear what will happen with provincial exams. If teaching and learning are to be project-based, using the inquiry method and a socioconstructivist approach, the current multiple-choice model for leaving exams doesn't work anymore."

Many practicalities also still need to be worked out, such as the end-of-cycle evaluation to be done by the cycle team. "I completely agree with this idea," said Rose. "But how will this be done in practical terms? If several Secondary IV teachers have to evaluate small groups of students 'in different contexts and over a sufficiently long period of time,' where will we find the time? The mechanisms for implementing the draft policy still need to be determined."

Noel Burke, Director of Educational Services for the New Frontiers School Board and co-chair of the implementation design committee with Ainsley Rose, considers the draft policy "an excellent document and a good point of departure for integrating evaluation into the daily practice of teaching and learning."

He says that people need to see that evaluation takes place not just at the end of teaching, but on an ongoing basis. "This helps students understand where they are along the path of learning, and how successful they are in achieving their goals."

Burke's major concern is that, according to the way the document is written, recognition of competencies takes place only at the end of the cycle.

"Achievement of a competency should be evaluated wherever the competency becomes apparent—why wait two years to report it if it is evident prior? This creates a problem for students who are more advanced," he said. "The intent seems to be that the evaluation of the achievement of competencies should be ongoing, but the way the draft policy is written—as well as the samples of reports that various boards are experimenting with—indicates that this evaluation takes place only at the end of the cycle."

These and many other concerns will no doubt be brought out and discussed during the consultation period, to extend from November 27, 2000 to March 1, 2001. Questionnaires, workshop materials and guides are being prepared to send to all school boards and educational institutions, i.e. public schools, private schools, vocational education centres and adult education centres. Their feedback will be compiled into a consolidated report, which will then be used to make adjustments to the policy.

Schools Experimenting with Different Approaches

by Eric Kramer

School boards and individual schools are currently experimenting with different types of report cards and different approaches.

The Western Quebec School Board, for example, is allowing individual schools to develop their own report cards. "To do otherwise seems contrary to the spirit of the program," said Ainsley Rose, Director of Educational Services.

The New Frontiers School Board, on the other hand, is trying out a board-wide report card. "We're taking this approach to facilitate mobility between schools and to have a common tracking system to track student progress and the success of the reform," explained Noel Burke, Director of Educational Services at the New Frontiers School Board.

He added that they think the report card should be computerized and kept as simple as possible. "We see the report card as a reference, not a 'be all and end all.' Teachers can complement this information with portfolios, projects, etc."

At Ste-Foy Elementary School (Central Quebec School Board), the cycle teams have developed report cards specific to each cycle.

"But we're trying to place less emphasis on the report card, and put more emphasis on the portfolio," said Andrew Aitken, principal. "We see the portfolio as a powerful assessment tool."

He admits that the report cards are the main stumbling block for parents. "Parents understand the portfolios and have no problem with that idea, but they still have a lot of questions about the report cards."

Aitken said parents are used to comparing how their child is doing in relation to others. "We're no longer comparing kids to each other. We're trying to say that it's not about competing, but about learning."

Royal Oak School in St-Hubert (Riverside School Board) has also been experimenting with various new evaluation approaches.

"This time in Cycle One, we did not even have a report card. We focused on the portfolio of the child's work, and used that as the basis for the parent conferences," explained Ellen Strike, director. For Elementary 4 to 6, they issued the usual report card, but without grade levels — "just effort and comments."

Next time they plan to have a 'student learning profile,' which will include competencies or parts of competencies where the student is strong, or where the student has shown weaknesses and requires support.

Strike stressed the importance of communicating with parents to make this transition. "It's very important to reassure parents that we're not backing off from clear evaluation, but that we're focusing on each child as an individual. They need to see the value in this approach."

Now that the school has been working with the new curriculum and new evaluation methods, Strike cannot imagine going back to old methods.

"Our goal is to look at the work the child has done instead of looking simply at test results, which, for a variety of reasons, may not reflect the actual learning that has taken place. This makes much more sense to me. It's more specific."

She also believes the new approach will draw parents in. "Many of our parent conferences are student led. If parents know their child is preparing for the conference and taking an active part, they are more likely to get involved."

Strike said the staff will now build on what they learned from their first round of parent conferences. "We still have a lot of fine-tuning to do, but that will always be the case. And perhaps that is the strength of this new approach."

The Proposed Orientations on Initial Teacher Training

by Lynne Rolland

Linking the training of future teachers and the education reform requires concerted efforts and partnership between the university, where teachers are trained, and the school, where they will practise. The Ministère de l'Éducation felt it was important to provide delegates at the province-wide meeting on November 7 with an overview of work done in this area over the past year, and presented the two orientations now proposed by the Ministère.

These two orientations, **the professionalization of teaching** and **greater emphasis on culture**, are in keeping with the reform of teacher training that began in the 1990s. Marielle Anne Martinet, who is in charge of initial teacher training at the Ministère de l'Éducation, stated: "The Ministère's objective is to train real teaching professionals by providing more opportunities for contact between universities and schools. In addition, experiments with new practices in schools, especially those that have significant results, should not remain isolated and without follow-up. They should be seen as opportunities for concerted action with universities, which should gather information and develop knowledge about these practices, formalize them and pass them on through teacher training."

"In the work that led to the Ministère's proposal, which is set out in Teacher Training - Orientations - Professional Competencies, the committee wanted to develop the concept of professionalization so as to give it meaning in teacher training," said Martinet. This concept has a number of dimensions that help clarify its meaning. In the first place, it implies the mobilization of specific professional knowledge, that is, the mobilization by the persons concerned of knowledge that is specific to a given occupation. "In this perspective, teacher training should develop professional competencies that are specific to the teaching profession. These professional competencies necessarily refer to actions that teachers are called on to carry out in their daily practice," explained Martinet.

Another dimension of professionalization is continuing education. "Being a professional means accepting that one's initial training is only the beginning of a dynamic process of ongoing learning that extends throughout one's career. Initial teacher training will thus have to help future teachers to develop a culture of continuous professional development, so that they may become professionals who are capable of adapting to the increasing complexity of situations and to a changing social and educational context."

Professionalization also implies effectiveness and efficiency. "Competent professionals are expected to know how to do the right things and carry out the right actions, and to do so with a certain economy of means," said Martinet.

In addition, the new curriculum, the choice of competencies as the basis for the development of the programs of study and the shift to a cycle-based organization call on another dimension of professionalization: the sharing of professional expertise. "Work on a pedagogical team, the kind of work that involves defining goals together and determining shared teaching strategies, or sharing the responsibility for making decisions that may have far-reaching consequences, in evaluation for instance, involves this sharing of professional expertise."

Finally, professionalization implies formalized practical knowledge, knowledge that can be described and transmitted through professional training.

Photo: Pierre Gravel

Marielle Anne Martinet
Conseillère à la formation initiale du Ministère de l'Éducation

The Inchauspé Report stressed the need to increase the cultural content of the curriculum and the importance of having cultured teachers. What is a cultured teacher? And how are cultured teachers trained? Before identifying the impact on teacher training, we must look at culture from a conceptual point of view.

First of all, culture may be defined in terms of objects. "No one can claim to be a cultured person unless he or she has acquired certain objects of culture or knowledge," said Martinet. Some of these are part of our primary culture, that is, the culture that has been transmitted to us and has marked us: our language, way of life, behaviour, beliefs. This primary culture is not acquired in school; it is the foundation on which other knowledge is constructed.

"The school is a key place of secondary culture, the culture that allows us to distance ourselves from our primary culture, to take a second look at the world and see, understand and interpret it differ-

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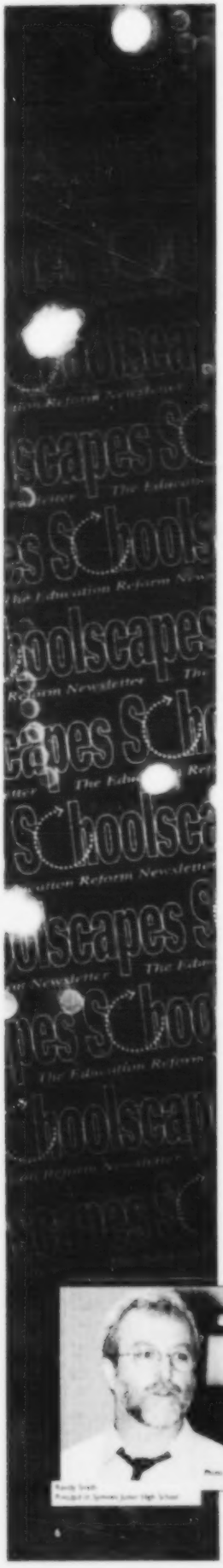

entity," explained Martinet. "As you know the knowledge stressed in school varies from society to society and from period to period. To look at culture from this perspective is to see it as normative," she pointed out.

Furthermore, culture has neither meaning nor value without reference to the relationships it produces with the world, with other people and with oneself. "For culture to make sense, it must give people access to a series of meanings and allow them to construct a relationship with the world." Culture must also correspond to expectations, benchmarks, a conception of life, and one's self-image in order to become a relationship to oneself in this way. Finally, this culture and these objects of knowledge must be shared with other people. Culture contains a relational dimension that is an integral part of its identity dimension. Culture becomes a relationship with other people.

What, then, will be the role of the teacher with regard to culture, and how should future teachers be trained to exercise this role? "In a pluralistic society like ours, it is no longer possible to conceive of the role of teacher as being to transmit a body of culture that is relatively stable, consistent, and valued by all. "We feel that the teacher's role may be seen as that of a cultural broker, a person who guides students, helps them overcome obstacles and enables them to go on to the next stage," said Martinet.

In her speech, Martinet also discussed the question of core professional competencies. "In order to be consistent with the orientation of professionalization, we have adopted the concept of professional competency. We feel that this concept provides the best way to link teacher training and professional practice in the real environment of the school," she added.

A professional competency is based on a number of resources, that is, on a variety of knowledge of a disciplinary, didactic or pedagogical nature, used in the context of professional activities. It is part of the knowledge to be mobilized in the context of professional activities. "It requires that a person be able to interpret the demands and constraints of the situation, identify the resources required and orchestrate, combine and integrate them in a way that is pertinent to the situation," said Martinet.

In addition, a professional competency is a behaviour that is manifested repeatedly. Martinet stressed that this is an important aspect of teacher training. "In evaluation, the competency acquired is demonstrated in a behaviour that is stabilized, not sporadic." Finally, a professional competency is situated on a continuum from the simple to the complex, and it targets objectives that are deemed desirable. It is thus a deliberate practice, an end in itself.

In conclusion, Martinet provided a brief sketch of the main exit profiles for the bachelor's degrees in teacher training. "The exit profiles are based mainly on the broad fields of study in the curriculum: languages, technology, science and mathematics, arts education, social sciences, and personal development." For each of the seven bachelor's degrees in teacher training, the exit profiles are as follows.

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

- Single profile
- Multidisciplinary
- Prepares future teachers to provide preschool education services and to teach all subjects in elementary school as provided for in the basic school regulation, with the exception of those subjects considered specialties

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

Language of instruction profile
- Single-discipline profile
- Prepares future teachers to teach the language of instruction as provided for in the basic school regulation

Mathematics profile
- Single-discipline profile
- Prepares future teachers to teach science and technology in both cycles of secondary school as provided for in the basic school regulation

Science and technology profile
- Multidisciplinary profile
- Habilite les futurs enseignants et enseignantes à enseigner, aux deux cycles du secondaire, la discipline de la science et de la technologie prévue au régime pédagogique

Social sciences profile
Two options:
- Prepares future teachers to teach history and citizenship education, geography, and understanding the contemporary world in both cycles of secondary school as provided for in the basic school regulation
- Prepares future teachers to teach history and citizenship education, ethics and "religious culture," and moral education in both cycles of secondary school. Catholic moral and religious instruction or Protestant moral and religious education may be offered on an optional basis as part of this profile.

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN ARTS EDUCATION

- Single-discipline profile
- More than one level
- Prepares future teachers to teach one of the arts disciplines in preschool, elementary and secondary education as provided for in the basic school regulation.

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH

- Single-discipline profile
- More than one level
- Prepares future teachers to teach physical education and health in preschool, elementary and secondary education as provided for in the basic school regulation

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE OR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Two profiles:
- Prepares future teachers to teach at both levels in the youth sector
- Prepares future teachers to teach in secondary school in the youth sector and the adult sector

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Prepares future teachers to work with a class of students with special needs in the third cycle of elementary school and the first cycle of secondary school in the youth sector and with a class of adults in basic education

Secondary School and the reform

Current Projects Embody the Essence of Changes to Come

BY THE EDITOR

Although implementation of the reform at the secondary level will not begin until 2003, many schools are already working with their students in ways that reflect elements of the new *Québec Education Program*. At a workshop on the second day of the November 6-7 Rencontre nationale, principals and teachers from three schools—Symmes Junior High School, Chateauguay Valley Regional High School and Centennial Regional High School—talked about structural changes they have made and specific projects they have carried out at their respective schools.

Randy Smith
Principal at Symmes Junior High School

Photo: Marvin Gandall

Symmes Junior High School (Western Quebec School Board)

Cross-Curricular Teams, Innovative Scheduling and a Thematic Approach to the QEP

Randy Smith, principal at Symmes Junior High School, said that when his teachers first got wind of the QEP, a few thought it was wonderfully empowering; most, however, were scared to death.

Smith therefore put a challenge to his staff. "I said, let's carve off a piece of this new curriculum and play with it. Let's investigate and experiment." They started with what they already knew and were already doing. For instance, one of the major ideas in the reform is that of cross-curricular teams.

"Curiously, we'd had cross-curricular teams for years—we just didn't know it." He explained that, taking direction from the Middle School movement in the United States, for the past six or seven years they have had "academic teams." Each academic team is led by an English teacher, a French teacher, a math teacher and a resource person.

"The idea was to create smaller communities within the larger community." Each teacher teaches two or three other subjects as well, to the same group of students. "So the number of different teachers Randy Smith as a Grade 7 student sees is reduced," Smith said.

These "academic teams" are now called "cross-curricular teams."

Since their inception, these teams have had three goals: to celebrate successes, to solve problems, and to create cross-curricular connections. While some of these goals are being achieved more than others, the basic dynamics are now in place.

A strategic factor to having these teams work, however, is giving teachers time. At Symmes, these teams meet every week. "This team meeting is counted as part of teachers' regular workload," he said. "It has the same import as teaching, supervision or remedial work. It is not an option. This is a very powerful strategy."

Organizational Changes

Where do they find this time? Well, it fits in with two other big changes the

school has made. First, they shifted from 50-minute periods to 75-minute periods. (Chateauguay Valley Regional has also switched to 75-minute periods. Principal Patricia Dagg discusses their experience in more detail below.)

Second, they have adopted a rather innovative schedule: on Wednesdays, the kids go home in the afternoon. The teachers use this time for curriculum development. For students, therefore, Wednesday are made up of four 55-minute periods. The lost time is tacked on to the other fours days through the addition of a 20-minute "advisory period" each day (also inherited from the Middle School background). Advisory periods are used for special projects, assemblies, and improving study skills.

"The Wednesday afternoons provide staff with clear-cut time for curriculum development. This is a very powerful strategy. What's more, this schedule has enriched our school life by creating a break."

The kids must love this, workshop participants commented, but what about the parents? "Amazingly, I have not had one complaint!" Smith said. The key was preparing the ground through a consultative process. Ainslie Rose, director of educational services for the Western Québec School Board, met with parents and explained that with the additional demands being placed on teachers, their biggest complaint was the lack of time. "Once parents understood this, they were very cooperative," said Smith.

The Symmes Olympic Pentathlon

Pierre Goulet, a French and History teacher at Symmes, talked about a specific project that the teachers carried out to experiment with the reform.

"We're a small school (280 students) with a very close-knit staff, and we often work on projects together. So we decided to further our understanding of the new program through cooperative learning," he explained.

They decided to develop a common project. After much discussion, they agreed on a theme: the Olympics. The next step was for teachers to find ways to link the theme to their own subjects.

"But we still weren't sure what 'cross-curricular' meant. We knew it had to do with making links between different subjects, but we weren't sure how."

They watched a video on the subject. While the video portrayed what Goulet and his colleagues felt was "a perfect world," it still gave them some ideas.

The teachers began to integrate the Olympics theme into their lessons in September. Students took French dictées on the Olympics theme, studied the history of ancient Greece ("a bit of a challenge, since we hadn't even gotten to pre-history yet"), used the Internet to do research on participating countries, discussed sports and nutrition, discussed the impact of technology on sports, and wrote e-mail letters to Canadian Olympic athletes.

All this led up to the big event: the Symmes Olympic Pentathlon. "Through arts, geography, cooking, social sciences, ICT, phys. ed., we wanted to involve students in activities where learning and fun would mess."

Students were therefore presented with five different challenges. These included building the Parthenon or the Sydney Opera House using masking tape and straws, identifying spices used in different kinds of cooking, and creating a design using their own bodies on the schoolyard pavement. For all of the activities, they had to work in groups. "Students had to help each other learn through acquired knowledge. Mostly they had to work together and improve on their organizational skills, which are lacking at this age level." In a short video shown during the November 7 workshop, students could be seen working actively and noisily in teams, focused on the task at hand.

"I love this scene," Smith said, pointing to four kids working together in the video. "There are two gifted students and two academically challenged students —and they are consulting with each other."

After the event, teachers reflected on how the Pentathlon activities and classroom work related to the Olympic theme had addressed the cross-curricular competencies and areas of lifelong learning outlined in the QEP. A written summary of these reflections was presented at the workshop.

One teacher wrote, "I found that throughout all these Olympic activities, students in general participated with respect to the rules and regulations. But what surprised me the most was the help, the respect with which they treated each other—even if some were weaker or did not know the answer. They had a common goal: to succeed in their task."

Students also reflected on what they had learned during this fun event. "We learned lots of social development skills because we had to solve things for ourselves," wrote one student. "We learned how to get along in a group. We learned how to be organized, how to be quiet and listen to our class leaders. We also learned a very important lesson—to have our teachers and staff trust us. Without them trusting us in the first place and giving us a chance, we wouldn't have been able to run around and figure out things for ourselves, without having teachers following us everywhere."

Let the kids do the work

Elaine Désaulniers has been a Québec teacher for over 20 years. For the past three years she has been teaching geography, ecology, moral and religious education and French immersion at Symmes Junior High School. Encouraged by the school principal, Randy Smith, she recently experimented with a more explorative method in her ecology class. She shared her experience with fellow workshop participants.

"So there I am near the Ottawa River with my group. Now, anyone who knows me will tell you I am the structured type: you walk into my classroom and my desks are lined vertically and horizontally on the line, my posters are symmetrical, the stapler is lined up on my desk... So there I am, I who usually has a directive, in-charge approach and is in control of everything. Picture this: my students are running all over the place. They're taking water and soil samples, they're filling out their observation charts, they're picking up specimens for the construct they'll have to do, whatever they can get their hands on. As I'm walking around, I can hear my principle's words of wisdom: 'It's positive learning going on, Elaine. They're having fun. And that's what it's all about.' But they're not talking to me! They don't need me! I feel like a tourist, taking a walk.

"I whistle, they pair up and it's time to go. Boy, that was the longest 75 minutes of my life. But not for them! They found it very short. I can hear Randy again: 'You should let the kids do the work, Elaine. Just stay there in case they need you. The students should be tired after a course—not the teacher.' Right.

"Then comes the lab part. I have to remind myself that noise is okay, that kids all over, conferencing, comparing insects they found, arguing about the smell coming out of jars is all part of the hands-on process. And yet, I race to the door and slam it really fast because to me, it's total chaos, a zoo. So my classroom's a mess, bottle caps, leaves and acorns are scattered all over the floor, it reeks of mold and mildew and rotten eggs, things are growing in those Ziplock bags, water is dripping from the containers, the posters are falling off the walls because they're so heavy, and then, as the students leave the classroom, they ask, 'Miss, when are we going back?'

"But how much did they learn? How can I measure if the goals I had set were attained? As I read some of the conclusions of the lab reports, I find, 'Thank you, Miss, it was so nice of you to take us to the park on a sunny day.' I say to myself, okay, back to the drawing board. Maybe I wasn't clear on what I was expecting from them—this is not quite the scientific conclusion I was hoping for. So I need to modify things a bit. But I ask myself, was it all worth it? They liked it, they worked hard, and they were motivated: that's a step in the right direction.

"... I think we're on to something. I still have a lot of issues to resolve before I feel comfortable with this new way of doing things with the children, but if I am helping them attain their goals by letting them choose which path they want to take to get there, I am making them part of the decision process and giving them a sense of accomplishment. That's what makes it positive and, I think, worthwhile."

Chateauguay Valley Regional (New Frontiers School Board)

School Improvement and Block Scheduling

Patricia Dagg, principal of Chateauguay Valley Regional, talked about the school improvement project she and her staff embarked on in 1995. Their objectives and the way they went about achieving them fit well within the approach advocated by the reform.

After surveying their strengths and weaknesses, school staff came up with three objectives: to improve teaching strategies, to improve the level of respect and responsibility among students, and to improve the building.

"We were told that we should stick to just two objectives. We were also told to stay away from the idea of student respect and responsibility, because we'd probably fall on our faces and cause a lot of disappointment."

Of course, they forged ahead with all three objectives anyway. They began with the building. "Thirty years of existence on shifting clay had wreaked havoc. The roof leaked (we had pails everywhere!), the pavement outside was heaved and cracked, no one had planted flowers in a very long time."

Although they had a limited budget, the tangible, concrete nature of the project made it easy to get students, parents and the whole staff involved. "Before you knew it the paint brushes were out, flowers were being planted, and all kinds of little, inexpensive projects were undertaken."

Photo: Marie Gosselin

Pierre Goulet
French and History teacher at Symmes Junior High School

At the time, they also had a problem with kids smashing ceiling tiles. So the art teacher created a class project where each student designed a tile, painted it and signed their initials. "We don't have a problem with kids smashing tiles anymore."

Elaine Désaulniers
Teacher at Symmes Junior High School

75-minute blocks

The other two objectives were much less tangible, however. Staff began by forming action teams on different topics. Participation was voluntary. These teams researched and held discussion on new teaching strategies, alternative organizational structures, etc.

"For example, we were still working with seven 42-minute periods," said Peter Derry, who teaches Secondary I. "When we talked with people in other schools, they called it the 'shopping centre' method—students grab a bit of this, a bit of that."

Photo: Marie Gosselin

Patricia Dagg
Principal of Chateauguay Valley Regional

After much consultation and debate, they agreed to have four 75-minute blocks a day, a six-day week, and two semesters a year. "Because we had learned to make decisions together, we were able to move forward quickly," said Dagg. "Of course, when people saw their new schedules, some panicked," recalled Derry. "Once they tried it, however, the feedback was very positive. A 75-minute period allows for a more constructivist approach, with more cooperative and active

Photo: Marie Gosselin

Peter Derry
Teacher at Chateauguay Valley Regional

Carol Marriott
Principal at Centennial Regional High School

Jennifer Goodall
Teacher at Centennial Regional High School

learning. We can have the students move around and interact."

Digg cited several other benefits of the 75-minute block approach. For one, kids (and their parents) realize that when they miss a class, they miss a big chunk. "There's been much less absenteeism as a result." Teachers are also much more reluctant to throw a student out of class. Finally, the whole building is calmer. "When you don't have a bell ringing every 40 minutes and kids running around in between, everyone is much more settled down."

She said that student respect and responsibility has improved as a natural outcome of these changes. The improvement process continues, with teaching and administrative staff working closely to discuss strategies, solve problems and ensure quality teaching.

They are also closely monitoring the results of their changes to make adjustments. For example, with the year divided into two semesters, some subjects are taught only half the year. One workshop participant wondered how this affects students' retention of the subject matter. Digg said they are continuing research in this area and keeping data to monitor the situation.

Centennial Regional High School (Riverside School Board)

Personalized Learning at Québec's Largest High School

With 1743 students, Centennial Regional is Québec's largest school. This year, they had a record 405 students enter Secondary I. Such a large and diverse population makes meeting the needs of all students and giving equal opportunity to each student quite a challenge.

However, Carol Marriott, principal, said she and many of her staff view the QEP with excitement. "There are so many elements that we're already familiar with. We feel it represents what until now we all saw as the hidden curriculum: and what we considered most important."

Eight years ago, she explained, their school embarked on two major transformations: they created a "Middle School" for Secondary I and II (to which Secondary III will now have be added to become Cycle Three), and they changed their delivery of services to students with special needs.

To begin with, they modified their overall approach so as to make the school student-centred. "Like all of us, we had programs, and the students had to fit into those programs. But of course, the students never came in in the right numbers to fit into the programs that existed. We finally noticed that we had to create the programs according to the needs of the students, and not vice-versa."

This meant "de-institutionalizing" the school, which was not a small task when it came to preparing the timetable. In fact, Marriott believes the biggest obstacles to the reform will be things that people have tried to tackle in previous reforms—such as the high school timetable.

Core groups

Another organization change was to create teaching teams with "core teachers." These teachers do not necessarily teach the traditional core subjects. Core teachers are hand-picked according to personality, flexibility, interests and background. They teach several subjects to the same group of students, and their group of students becomes their group.

"Each group has a home base: they choose a name, they decorate their room, they work together, they compose in intramurals together. They really see themselves as a unit."

Jennifer Goodall has been teaching at Centennial for three years. Her group has named itself the "Globetrotters." As a former student of the school, Goodall can testify to the changes that have occurred.

"When I was there, I never really felt like it was a home for me. It is the largest English school, and that's what it felt like. Now, however, it has a very different feel. I know the students in my core class feel like they belong and that they have a home."

Goodall teaches English, history and integrated computer technology to her group. She says that by working with the same students for several periods, you get to see all the things they can do. "I get a chance to see each of my students do well in something."

It also means she can make links between the different subjects. "Cross-curricular activities are a given in our class. My students never know if we're in English or computer class or ecology or reading, because it all comes together."

Resource teachers in classrooms

The most important change the school undertook, however, was to move to an inclusive model. Of the 1743 students, about 400 (or 23 percent) have special needs. In the past, the school had smaller, segregated groups for these students. Now, these students remain in the regular classrooms, and it is the paraprofessionals—or other resource teachers—who go into the classrooms.

"The students don't know who has special needs, because the resource person is there to help anyone who puts their hand up and needs help," Marriott explained. "The resource teacher merely provides the regular teacher with an extra pair of hands."

At first, some teachers reacted with fear: they didn't want someone 'spying' on them. Eventually however, when those teachers saw the model at work, they wanted resource teachers in their classrooms too!

While initially these resource people were the paraprofessionals who formally taught the segregated groups, several regular teachers now act as resource teachers as well.

"We picked teachers who we thought would do a good job, who would work well with others, who were open and non-threatening. Teaching used to be a private act. It's now becoming much more collaborative."

Another personalized approach the school takes is to match students to the teachers in advance. Staff visit the elementary schools and speak at length with the Grade 6 teachers to find out about the individual students who will be arriving the following year. They then match the students' needs and personalities to the personalities and strengths of the teachers.

"We really advocate the importance of the contact between the student and a significant adult. Many of these kids don't have appropriate role models or significant adults in their world. They're also at an age where they're pushing away from people at home."

Portfolios and a home page

Teachers are encouraged to use a number of strategies to individualize learning. One strategy the school advocates is to celebrate successes, "in whatever form they come in." A variety of methods are used, from school assemblies where awards are given out for improvement, effort, perseverance and particular achievements, to "starboards" in individual classrooms.

In addition to these methods, Goodall has found one tool, which is encouraged by the reform, particularly useful for giving all her students the opportunity for success: the portfolio.

"It allows a Grade 7 or 8 student who has trouble reading, for example, to show progress. This is the case of one of my students, whose portfolio shows that he has actually read two books in the last year. He still needs an audiotape to help him, but he has in fact made significant progress. So he doesn't have to continue getting the same failing mark: he's gotten all through elementary school."

The portfolios include a periodic self-evaluation. "This way each person has their own specific goals."

Another aspect of Middle School, she said, is that students are encouraged to get involved in extra-curricular activities. "My role is not only an academic one, but also consists in helping students find their niche, so that they will want to come to school." This might be anything from participating in sports competitions to working on the school Web site.

This last activity was particularly popular among Goodall's students. In fact, last year her group won the Middle School home page competition.

Goodall's class has a very high percentage of students who have been identified as having special needs. However, looking at what her group has accomplished one would never know it.

The home page project proved especially rewarding for these students. "It turned out that a lot of the kids who had troubling reading were gifted at programming. So suddenly they shone: all the other kids wanted their help, and they took on a leadership role."

The project gave everyone a chance to show off their skills: some students wrote stories and poems, others prepared artwork which was then scanned and posted on a "museum" page, others did the programming.

The results are impressive. As Goodall displayed parts of the home page on an overhead screen, workshop participants reacted with amusement and admiration at the high quality and originality of the students' work.

Although only on CD-ROM at the moment, the Globetrotters' home page will soon be available for viewing on the school's Web site, at <http://www.crhs.rsb.qc.ca>.

The students' work is so impressive that Goodall's group has been chosen to take part in a special project over the next three years, they will put together [illegible] portfolios. The MEQ is filming the process.

All this occurred before the arrival of the QEP. But now that the reform is underway, "we're excited because it addresses all these issues," said Marriott. "For example, the idea of looping is already happening. Teachers see the development of their students and want to continue working with them."

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